



Visual Disasters Created in College Students' English Presentation and Their Solutions

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Abstract: The present paper is an analysis of the visual disasters created in college students' English presentation and their solutions. Five major types of visual barriers or distractions, letter visual barrier, word size visual barrier, text visual distraction, image visual distraction and color visual barrier are studied elaborately in a bid to help students avoid making such visual disasters in their presentation.

Keywords: Visual Disasters, Visual Barriers, Visual Distractions, Solutions.

1. Introduction

It is quite common for college students to give their English presentation with the aid of PowerPoint. Our team collected a random sample of 1,158 PowerPoint slides from our students and found that a surprising total of 314 of our students had created various visual disasters in their PowerPoint for their audience. These visual disasters prevent their English presentation becoming a true success. The paper tries to familiarize students with five major visual disasters they may create in PowerPoint making: letter visual barrier, word size visual barrier, text visual distraction, image visual distraction and color visual barrier. After the introduction of the five visual disasters and their corresponding solutions, students are expected to be able to avoid creating visual barriers or distractions in PowerPoint for their audience or make their PowerPoint a visual aid to their English presentation.

2. Body

Although some students are appreciated for their beautiful pronunciation, well-matched gestures, willingness to interact, logic and passion, occasionally, their PowerPoint turns out to be a visual disaster rather than a visual aid for their audience. And that very visual barrier or distraction is what prevents their presentation becoming an effective one. So to solve the visual problems, the first thing to do before getting

down to business is to raise students' awareness of the visual disasters they may have created in PowerPoint making and highlight the importance of effective visual effects in real-situation English presentation.

2.1 Letter Visual Barrier and its Solutions

The first type of visual disaster is "letter visual barrier". While few students capitalize all letters (FAST AND SAFE WEIGHT LOSS TIPS), some students do make the mistake of capitalizing just the first letter of the first word for the title (Fast and safe weight loss tips). What's worse, many students capitalize some first letters of the first words in the bullet lines, and leave their counterparts uncapped. It may go like this:

Burn more calories than you consume
start with some body-weight exercises
Choose healthier cooking methods
Reduce the frequency of visiting Walmart or Carrefour
use supplements

So what is the possible solution to this type of visual disaster? First all of, students should avoid putting words in all capital letters, as lower case lettering is obviously more readable than all capital letters. Second, students are supposed to capitalize the first letters of all major words for the title, as this type of lettering suggests a more formal situation than having just the first letter of the first word capitalized. Third, for the bullet point lines, students should capitalize the first letters of the first words and no other letters unless they normally appear capped like the word "Walmart" or "Carrefour" mentioned above.

2.2 Word Size Visual Barrier and its Solutions

The next major visual barrier is caused by improper word size. When giving English presentation in class, size does matter a huge lot. However, some students' typed words on the screen are not large and clear enough for their audience to see. Coming to the size of font, title font can vary between 36 and 40, whereas font for text body should be no smaller than 24, or else it may not be visible to people sitting at the back of the presentation area. In addition, the font size of any level of headings should be larger than that of the bullet. It is highly recommended that you choose font size 36 for the title and 28 for the bullet lines.

2.3 Text Visual Distraction and its Solutions

The third type is text visual distraction. Many students tend to overcrowd their slides with words, which will lead inevitably to the presenters' monotonous reading. Such improper presentation goes as follows on a certain page of PowerPoint.

Effects of Global Warming

Global warming is causing the temperature of the Earth to slowly rise, leading to massive global changes of our natural environment. First of all, it is rapidly melting glaciers around the globe, causing rising sea levels and possibly coastal flooding and other weather problems in the future. In addition, it is changing certain ecosystems worldwide due to temperature fluctuations. Animals and plants are being forced to adapt to this, and as a result are dying off.

Students do not actually have to read the words straight off the screen because their audience can read themselves. PowerPoint slides should serve merely as an aid rather than the “protagonist” of students’ presentation. In other words, students should not depend too much on PowerPoint which is only a supplementary means to aid students’ presentation. Students should focus on conveying their ideas through various other means such as spoken words, written forms on the blackboard, eye contact, gestures etc. and on the communication with their audiences and their responses. Therefore, students have to simplify and limit the number of words on each screen. By using key phrases and include only essential information, the presenters enable their audience to focus on them and their ideas instead of on the slides on the screen. An improved version of PowerPoint page may change into one like this:

Effects of Global Warming

1. Melting glaciers

Rising sea levels and extreme weather

2. Ecosystem changes

The extinction of many plant and animal species

2.4 Text Visual Distraction and its Solutions

Some images can create visual distractions. Images are more than photos. Tables, charts, diagrams and graphs are all excellent ways to illustrate points and draw the audience into a story. Relevance is the key for students who want to use images. Decorative images have nothing to do with the ideas one is to express through messages. They can only distract the audience’s attention. So students should be told to add images to their presentation that can explain and complement their messages rather than useless decorative ones.

Let me give an example to illustrate the above points. A student wants to give a presentation on the translation of “xiao” of Xiangyun and Daiyu in “A Dream in Red Mansions” based on their different personalities and the context. The English translation goes as follows.

1. “Why, Ai Brother and Sister Lin!” she cried cheerfully. “You can be together every day.....”
2. “The lisper loves to rattle away,” said Daiyu with a laugh. “Fancy saying ai instead of er like that.”.

Under this circumstance, it is obviously more appropriate and enlightening for students to post pictures of Daiyu and Xiangyun with a smile or laugh to match the typed messages rather than decorative images like a cartoon rabbit or the like.

2.5 Color Visual Barrier and its Solutions

The last possible visual barrier is about color matching between text and background. What’s the point of a student’s presentation if his or her audience cannot even see what are all typed on the screen? So color matching lays a foundation of one’s presentation as bad color matching will make his or her PowerPoint a real visual disaster. Color matching is profound knowledge. According to psychological perceptions of human beings, colors can be divided into two types--warm colors and cool colors. Warm colors include red, yellow, orange, light green, light blue and so on. Dark purple, Cyan, dark green, dark blue and black are examples of cool colors. To achieve desirable visual effects, students should make their text and background contrasting colors. To match warm color background, text should be in cool colors. And to match cool color background, text should be in warm colors or in white. Students should not try to use pictures as background, as they make it hard to read the text. If they feel they must use a picture as background, they must think out ways to let the text stand out. Anyway, it is the ideas that truly matter.

3. Conclusion

To make students’ PowerPoint a visual aid to an English presentation or at least to prevent it from becoming a visual disaster, the paper introduces five visual disasters and visual aid tips by using such methods as categorization, contrast, question-asking and problem-solution teaching pattern. Students who have put the above tips into practice are well on their way to giving a perfect English presentation. By following these tips, students will pay more attention to the visual disasters they might have created in their PowerPoint and manage to make their PowerPoint a visual aid to their English presentation.

References

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